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ABSTRACT

Current literature reveals little with regard to the delivery of programs and services to the visually handicapped by university and college counseling centers. Philosophically and logistically counseling centers are in the position to not only sensitize the academic community to the needs of the visually handicapped, but also to support the personal, social, and educational development of each visually handicapped student on campus. This paper describes the development of the relationship between the Counseling Bureau of the University of South Carolina and the South Carolina Commission for the Blind. This relationship has resulted in cooperative precollege summer programming for visually handicapped students, ongoing support systems responding to the specific needs of a visually handicapped university population during the academic year as well as during the summer, and the development of a resource center which programmatically and technically facilitates the social, personal, and educational development of visually handicapped students on campus. (Author)

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A COUNSELING BUREAU RESOURCE CENTER FOR VISUALLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

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A COUNSELING BUREAU RESOURCE CENTER
FOR VISUALLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

Curiously, very little has been reported in recent literature about roles played by university and college counseling centers with regard to the delivery of programs and services to the visually handicapped. Historically, counseling centers have been responsive, but perhaps a sufficiently high priority has not been granted generally to the visually handicapped. Suffice it to say that the needs of the visually handicapped student may no longer be overlooked on today's campuses. Counseling centers, both philosophically and logistically, are in the unique position of being able to not only sensitize the academic community to the needs of the visually handicapped, but more importantly, to support the personal, social and educational development of each visually handicapped student on the campus.

Lacking any local precedent, the Counseling Bureau of the University of South Carolina became informally affiliated with the South Carolina Commission for the Blind prior to and during the summer of 1972, during which a six week residential pre-college program for a group of blind and visually handicapped students was conducted on campus. Pre-existing programs and facilities of the University were utilized with coordinative and supportive elements originating within the Counseling Bureau. The goals of the summer pre-college program were to aid the students in their transition from high school to college, to identify those who appear reasonably capable of participating in a full time college program, and to help each student with the career development process. The summer program further allowed for a thorough assessment of the personal management, mobility, and the communications skills of the participating students.

As a result, the summer program acted not only as a preparation for college adjustment, but also as a means of evaluation for the feasibility of continuing a collegiate program or the selection of an appropriate alternative.

Summer programs have been held subsequently during the summers of 1973 and 1974, during which the Counseling Bureau has begun to assume a more dynamic role with increased increments of time, interest, and most importantly, commitment. During this period of time, the physical deficiencies of the campus in general as they relate ot the visually handicapped became increasingly apparent. The library was virtually unavailable for use by blind and visually handicapped students. A large campus with complicated traffic patterns made mobility an overwhelming challenge. Visually handicapped students may have sought support from among themselves, but there was no built-in support system emerging from the institution. Because the student left his rehabilitation counselor in his home area, difficulties could be expected for the student in dealing with specific needs on an emergency level. Each visually handicapped student was left to his own resources in the area of securing readers for the purpose of recording written material. Registration periods rather dramatically demonstrated the institutional barriers faced by the visually handicapped student. While during the course of the summer programs a number of significant needs were addressed, prior to 1974 there was little or no follow-through into the subsequent academic year for those students who chose to continue at the University.

The needs of visually handicapped students on this campus became increasingly obvious, and combined with the prospect of increased numbers of blind and visually handicapped students coming to campus, it became necessary that an active advocate of the visually handicapped emerge on campus. The Counseling Bureau became the logical agency in this instance. Financial support was secured

by the Counseling Bureau through an agreement with the South Carolina Commission for the Blind. A part time staff member was hired to specifically address himself to the programmatic aspects of the 1974 summer pre-college program along with a newly developed on-going academic year program. This position was matched by the Counseling Bureau with the reallocation of funds in support of a second part-time staff person. As a result of this combined support, the 1974 summer program stood out as the best to date, with the prospect for the 1975 summer program being extraordinarily well planned and coordinated.

Of major significance, however, were the accomplishments materializing during the 1974-75 academic year. The Counseling Bureau has assumed responsibility, in close cooperation with the academic departments, for the advisement and registration of visually handicapped students. On-going assessments of the progress of the student are conducted through studies of the effect of intervention on achievement and adjustment. Personal counseling as well as academic and vocational counseling have become a routine for many of the students, with group processes assuming a large degree of significance to them. The staff members for this program are usually the first called in the event of a crisis which may range from a personal-emotional mishap to the breakdown of a piece of strategic equipment. The creative flow of ideas emerging from the small staff associated with this program is further characterized by plans for a handbook for faculty members with visually handicapped students in their class, relief maps of the campus, cassette recordings of the school newspaper, to make note of a few of the emergent ideas.

The willingness of the South Carolina Commission for the Blind to provide a substantial inventory of equipment combined with the absence of a specific area in the Counseling Bureau which could be devoted exclusively to both the summer pro-

grams and the on-going academic year programs, focused on the obvious need for a Resource Center for visually handicapped students. Ideally, a center should be multi-purposed and possess certain characteristics prerequisite to adequate utilization. Significant among these characteristics would be general availability during most or all of the hours of the day, easy physical accessibility, and security for the students as well as the large inventory of equipment and material to be housed in the center.

A room off the lobby of a major residential area of the campus was located and reassigned to the Counseling Bureau to serve as the Resource Center for visually handicapped students. The location of the room is favored by twenty-four hour a day supervision by virtue of the residence hall setting, during which accessibility and availability are assured to the student at his own discretion. Security of the Resource Center is enhanced by its location. The latter is of much importance because of the high value placed on the equipment contained in the Resource Center. The residence hall setting gives credibility to a viable living-learning concept. The Center, approximately sixteen by forty feet in size, is well equipped with book shelves which are moveable and serve as area dividers. Carpeting and draperies assure a good level of sound control. Lighting has been assessed and increased to meet the levels required by the partially sighted student.

The functions of the Resource Center serve as a basis for the physical arrangement. The two main areas of the Center are identified as the Technical Area and the Reading Area. The Technical Area contains an equipped administrative center and furniture designed for the utilization of the specialized equipment which it will contain.

Equipment assigned to the Technical Area includes:

G. E. Cassette Recorder

Sony 105-A Tape Recorder

RS-3 Visualtek Machine

RS-3 Picture Monitor for Visualtek

Smith-Corona Classic 12, Large Print Typewriter

Portable Electric Language Typewriter/Case

Model 300, 29 Type, Speech Typewriter

Varispeech Machine with Broom Mike Headphone

The Reading Area, more informally furnished, is equipped for oral reading by volunteers, and serves for social, instructional, and group progess purposes. The Reading Area contains Webster's New World Braille Dictionary of the American Language; College Edition; 72 Volumes. This edition is the first of its type on campus.

At this writing, the Resource Center is in the process of being outfitted with the expectation of its being fully operational during the spring semester of 1975. During the planning stages of the Center, visually handicapped students have been consulted, providing significant in-put into both the physical and the programmatic aspects of the Center. A new, multi-million dollar library, in close proximity to the Resource Center, is scheduled for completion at a near date on this campus. While far more adequate, the new library will not be able to take into account those conditions necessary for full utilization by visually handicapped students. Consequently, the Resource Center is viewed as a necessary, permanent adjunct to the educative process of the visually handicapped students on this campus, serving as the physical core of the Counseling Bureau's program for the visually handicapped both during the summer and the academic year programs.

The Resource Center has grown to be symbolical of the fundamental committment of the Counseling Bureau to serve the needs of visually handicapped students, which this writer considers a new frontier in the role and expectations of a counseling center.